

FIRST BREEDING OF WOODSWALLOWS IN NEW ZEALAND

The arrival in mid-summer, 1971-72, of two species of Australian Wood-swallow at Naseby Forest, Central Otago, was previously reported by Darby (1972).

A diary of the daily movements, habits and any changes was kept by Mrs D. M. Shaw until 29 January 1973, since when it has been continued by Mr and Mrs A. Coster. The following changes have occurred since last published.

WHITE-BROWED WOOD-SWALLOW (*Artamus superciliosus*)

The remaining two males were present up till 20 October 1972 when the Shaws went on short leave. There was a wintry snowstorm on 26 October. No sightings were made on 28 October when they returned from leave.

On 14 November one bird (the one originally caught and banded) was sighted at 6.20 p.m. and pecked at bread thrown to it. On 17 November another joined it, both fed confidently on bread thrown on the lawn and have remained near the house ever since. (On 7 April 1973 the ventral chestnut colouring seemed paler than in January.)

MASKED WOOD-SWALLOW (*A. personatus*)

The mated pair were present until 27 July 1972. There was a period of heavy frosts at the time. About an inch of snow fell on 3 August and again on 26 October wintry conditions with snow prevailed. A similar day was experienced on 6 March 1973, and on 9 March about midday what is presumed to be the same two adult birds returned with two flying young. For about an hour there was much calling, chattering and general excitement between them and the White-browed. The adults fed on bread placed on a tree-stump in a field next to the house section and were very aggressive towards house sparrows, blackbirds and thrushes also attracted to the bread. The adults then fed the young in a nearby larch on what appeared to be blowflies. At this stage the young were adept fliers but did not seem to feed themselves. The plumage was much speckled with white dorsally (like winter starlings) and showed indistinct transverse barring ventrally (more towards the sides) reminiscent of immature Shining Cuckoo.

By 24 March the young were becoming more independent and on 25 March they fed with parents on lunch scraps about 40m from some boys. The family indulged in much aerial acrobatics during this period and when roosting hunched very tightly together on wires or branches, especially on cooler days. On 31 March, led by the White-browed, all came close to the house and fed from a bird-table near the section fence. They were now tolerant of sparrows but still aggressive to other species. By 2 April frosty weather was beginning, insects were fewer (particularly in the morning), and the birds became more dependent on bread and scraps. Meanwhile the feeding table was gradually being moved closer to the house for photography.

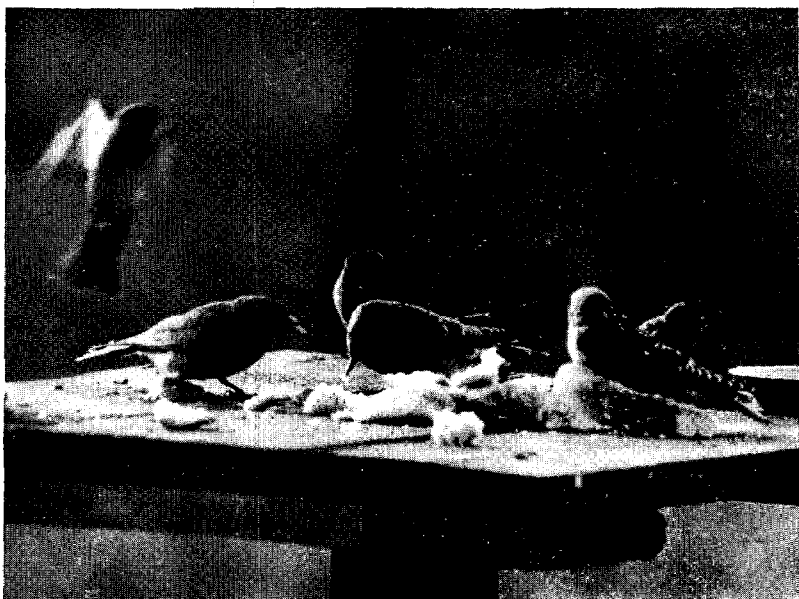


FIGURE 1 — Masked Wood-swallows feeding on bread with House Sparrows; adult female on the left and the two immatures (centre and right) with whitish barring and speckling on their dorsal surfaces. Naseby Forest, 7 April 1973.

Photo: P. Child

I visited the Costers on 7 April and observed and photographed all six birds from about 2 p.m. to 5 p.m. (Figs. 1 & 2). The afternoon was very mild and sunny with a slight southwest breeze. At 2 p.m. all six birds were roosting and preening high in *Pinus ponderosa* 20 m from the house, with occasional forays soaring effortlessly in thermals and probably catching airborne insects. The immatures were slightly smaller and noticeably slimmer than the parents. Their plumage patterns were alike, both closely resembling that of the adult female, except that the dorsal slaty-blue still showed a few white flecks on the outer wings and nape, the underparts were dusty-grey rather than silver-grey, and the dark facial markings were also more smoky than in the adult. There were no distinct colour delineations as in the male; this might suggest that both offspring are female.

The Masked continue to be more wary than the White-browed, and it is always the latter which leads the way to the feeding table.

Frequent rather harsh chitterings and the more typical Wood-swallow communication calls were characteristic of the family group, but no mutual preening or feeding of the young by the adults was observed by me.

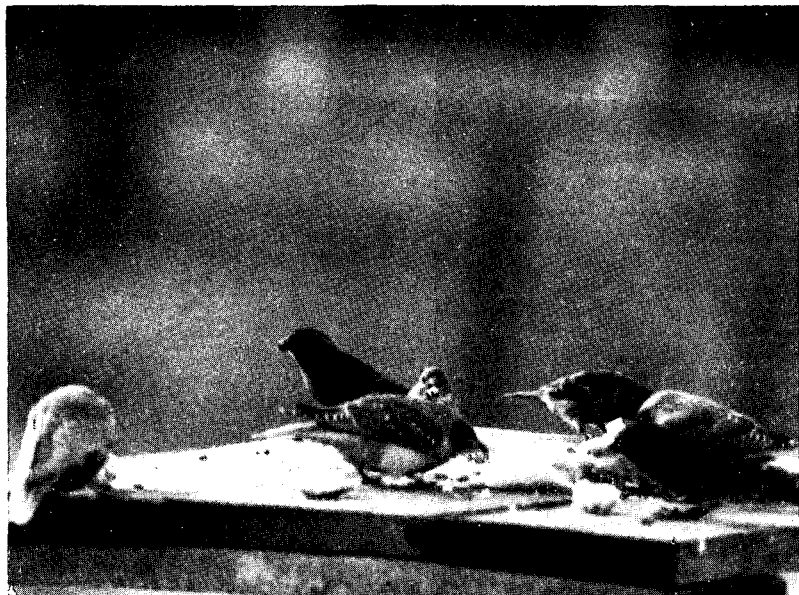


FIGURE 2 — The two immature Masked Wood-swallows feeding on bread with House Sparrows. On the extreme left is a male White-browed Wood-swallow. Naseby Forest, 7 April 1973.

Photo: P. Child

Observations and photographs were made in very good light at various places, down to a distance of 8 m at the bird-table.

We have no idea where the birds bred; no sightings were made elsewhere in the forest area or vicinity during their absence, but as the absence period lasted some six months it is obvious their nomadic habit could have taken them a long distance from Naseby. The clutch of two is typical of the species (Rowley *in* Frith 1969).

I am very grateful to the Shaws and the Costers for their hospitality and for access to their diary records.

LITERATURE CITED

- DARBY, J. T. 1972. The Australian White-browed Wood-Swallow in New Zealand. *Notornis* 19 (2): 114-117, figs 1-2.
- ROWLEY, J. C. R. 1969. Wood-swallows. Pp. 452-457, pl. XXXIII *in*: FRITH, H. J. (ed.). *Birds in the Australian high country*. Pp. 1-481, 1 text-fig., 4 maps, pls 1-13, col. pls I-XXXIV. Sydney, &c.: A. H. & A. W. Reed.

PETER CHILD

10 Royal Terrace,
Alexandra